



Veterans of Foreign Wars

Department of Arizona

Joint Opening Session

Governor Jan Brewer
Thursday, June 10, 2010

I am honored to have this opportunity to welcome you members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Arizona to your 90th Annual State Convention.

Here in Arizona, we understand the needs of our veterans ... we understand and, even in these challenging economic times, we do all that we can to meet the needs of our 600-thousand veterans living in the Grand Canyon State. I am proud to have championed HB 2195 for you – allowing charitable groups to play pull-tabs in their halls – after developing a workable solution this year and, with your help, ensuring that the bill passed through the Legislature.

As Governor, I fully realize that serving our veterans properly depends on a working partnership between the federal government and the state.

And, I am proud to say that our Arizona Department of Veterans' Services has an outstanding working relationship not only with the federal V-A, but also with the various veterans' service organizations such as the V-F-W.

My Director of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, Colonel Joey Strickland, is the only American Indian director of a state veterans' department in the country. He spends much of his time out in the various regions of the state meeting with our veterans AND, he is a life member of the V-F-W!

We in Arizona have a long military tradition that not only pre-dates our short history as a state, but that even pre-dates the signing of the U-S Declaration of Independence!

The Spanish Conquistadors first entered what is now our beloved Arizona in the 15-hundreds.

In 1752 the Presidio at Tubac was established. Twenty-three years later, in 1775, a Spanish captain selected a piece of land on the east side of the Santa Cruz River for a presidio or fort that was manned by Spanish and then Mexican soldiers until the territory became part of the United States in 1853 by the Gadsden Purchase.

That piece of land is now called Tucson.

During the American Civil War, the southern part of Arizona was a Confederate Territory before it officially became a U-S Territory in 1863.

Following the Civil War, Arizona became the center stage for the Indian Wars. Fort Whipple, Fort Apache, Fort Verde, Fort McDowell, Fort Lowell, Fort Bowie became legendary names as did the names of Cochise, Geronimo, and General George Crook.

In the late 19-hundreds, the famed Buffalo Soldiers came to Arizona being stationed at Fort Huachuca which today remains the oldest active military post in Arizona and the home of U-S Military Intelligence.

When the Spanish-American War began in 1898, Arizona provided two troops men to become part of the First Volunteer Cavalry – the “Roughriders.”

The idea for the regiment originated with Bucky O'Neill, the Mayor of Prescott and a famous frontier sheriff. Their executive officer was Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt.

The First Infantry Regiment of the Arizona National Guard became the 158th Infantry Regiment in World War One and was sent to France. The regiment was mustered out of federal service on May 3, 1919.

In World War Two, the 158th Infantry Regiment trained in jungle warfare and became famous as the Bushmasters after the deadly bushmaster snake. General Douglas Mac Arthur personally selected and requested that the Bushmasters be sent to his command in the Southwest Pacific.

MacArthur later said that, “No greater fighting combat team has ever deployed for battle.”

Arizona was also home to the Navajo and Hopi code talkers.

Arizonans have answered their nation’s call to arms in Korea, Viet Nam, Panama, Grenada, Desert Storm, Afghanistan, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Today, members of the Arizona National Guard are deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq.

Today, Luke Air Force Base is the home of the 56th Fighter Wing and Davis-Monthan Air Force Base is the home of the 355th Fighter Wing and both are very, very important to Arizona's economy.

So, you see, our state has a long and distinguished military history and a long history of respecting our veterans and understanding the on-going cost of freedom through the ages – a cost Arizonans have been willing to pay and continue to pay.

Today, I wish to commend you men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars for being among the loudest voices on behalf of our veterans.

Our goals are the same and shall always be the same – ensuring that our veterans receive all of the benefits to which their service has entitled them.

When I am with you, I see tales of uncommon courage, and lives being lived with the unassuming honor of patriots.

You go quietly about your days -- having given the rest of us the precious gifts of life and freedom and faith.

I see a wisdom forged from sacrifice and tempered in history – your honorable service has become our most treasured blessing.

I see and understand how you saved democracy, and why our hearts are lifted by your presence, and why our debt to you is impossible to repay -- except by a solemn promise to continue the search for peace with a vigilant defense of liberty.

God bless you and your families, God bless Arizona, and God bless the United States of America.

Thank you.